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ABSTRACT

This draft is the outcome of a project in which colleges and further education (FE) teacher education providers worked to pilot a code developed by students and staff at Loughborough College in England. The code is intended to be a resource for improving practice and enhancing the standing of the FE sector. It focuses on the essentials, affirms good practice, provides a reference point in times of change, and counterbalances narrow instrumentalism and fragmentation. The code is intended to provide a basis for dialog and a framework for articulating values and clarifying mutual expectations. This paper is organized in sections that cover the following: (1) introduction, the code; (2) issues raised in developing the code; (3) the challenges of adapting and adopting the code; (4) guidelines for using the code; (5) applications of the code in the learning environment; (6) feedback from pilot colleges; and (7) 20 possible sources of information and other codes. (KC)

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A code of practice for further education

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1. Introduction

Many influences combine to make this an opportune time for the FE sector to produce a code of practice giving clear expression to the sector's core ethical values, essential attitudes and behaviours.

Such a code, endorsed and validated across the sector, supported by training and effectively monitored, would be a powerful resource for improving practice and enhancing the standing of the sector. It would focus on what matters; affirm good practice; provide a reference point in times of change; and counterbalance narrow instrumentalism and fragmentation. It would create an opportunity to develop a shared sense of purpose and to build trust through the recognition of mutual dependency.

This draft is offered as a contribution to the debate about how the FE sector defines and affirms its professionalism. It is the outcome of a project in which FEDA worked with colleges and FE teacher education providers to pilot a code developed by students and staff at Loughborough College.

A number of organisations, such as the AoC, APC, FEFC, NATFHE and UNISON, provided informal feedback on the draft. We are grateful for the comments received, which have been taken into account in the preparation of this publication.

Since incorporation, many colleges have focused on restructuring curriculum and staffing, and are now focusing again on fostering the shared developmental culture of Investors in People. In the light of *Learning works* (FEFC, 1997) and *The learning age* (DfEE, 1998) colleges need to revisit their mission statements and to give priority to translating those values into effective action.

The FE sector has traditionally encompassed a staff from a variety of professional backgrounds and this has militated against a united voice. However, the increasing involvement of staff from non-educational backgrounds has heightened recognition of the need to make the sector's values more explicit.

The code is intended to provide a basis for dialogue and a framework for articulating values and clarifying mutual expectations. It should not be introduced as a management initiative but as a joint initiative involving management, unions and professional associations. There should be an opportunity for college staff to consider whether the college wishes to adopt the code, or an appropriate variation of it.

For those directly involved in teaching and learning, this code of practice can be seen as a companion document to FENTO's *Standards for teaching and supporting learning in England and Wales* (FENTO, 1999) and should be read in conjunction with it.

This code of practice complements, but is separate from, standards of job competence. The distinction can be illustrated by considering how falling short of the code's standards might be described as 'unprofessional conduct, malpractice or misconduct', rather than as 'incompetence'.

The code

1. Recognise that learners and learning are our core responsibilities, and act appropriately.
2. Recognise and respect the uniqueness of each individual.
3. Be honest, clear and open in all communications, acting with integrity and fairness, and challenging discrimination.
4. Contribute to the success of the college by actively seeking to develop innovative, effective and efficient ways of achieving the college's goals.
5. Be informed about and fulfil our legal responsibilities.
6. Challenge any abuse of privileged relationships, respecting and protecting confidentiality.
7. Ensure that our work conforms to external and internal quality standards.
8. Request and use resources responsibly, efficiently and effectively.

2. Issues raised in developing the code

- There is a strong desire for a national code. Since colleges are independent bodies, what would be its status? Advisory? Recommended?
- How far can or should colleges customise the code?
- The focus of the code is on acceptable behaviour and conduct. It sets out to be a reference point in moral dilemmas by making clear the underlying values and attitudes that characterise further education; thus, it stands alongside FENTO's work of identifying standards for teaching and supporting learning in FE in England and Wales.
- It is vitally important to involve all staff and all unions whose members work in FE.
- What is the appropriate balance between idealism and realism? College staff, managers and unions warmed to the inspirational tone of the code, emphasising pride in the sector and wanting to promote the service. It contrasted with a college code which had been seen as insulting because it focused on the negative. On the other hand, there was apprehension that it could be abused as a management tool – 'another way to turn the screw on staff'. How explicit should it be? How would it be monitored? Who guards the guardians? The code needs to foster partnerships in colleges between staff, managers, trade unions and professional associations.
- What are the contractual implications of the code? How can it best be integrated? Many documents exist in colleges, largely unread and unused. The code should not be just another one of these. If it is properly embedded, a separate set of monitoring procedures should not be necessary.
- Ownership of the code is essential and requires a strong lead but it must emphasise the code's evolution from best practice.

3. The challenge

The challenge is to produce a code which is an inspirational framework, giving shape and structure to the sector, and is sufficiently earthed in daily practice to be used as a living, working document by all.

The code needs to be:

- **a code of professional practice for the FE sector**, rather than a 'code of conduct', a term with disciplinary connotations
- **framed in short bullet-point principles** applicable throughout the sector and capable of widespread, low-cost dissemination, in credit-card format or via the Internet
- **applicable to everyone working in FE**, since everyone contributes to the professionalism of the sector. The code is intended to be applicable to all staff. The interpretations on pages 4 and 5 focus on its application in the learning environment. Interpretations will be different for those working in other specialisms in FE and will be informed by codes of conduct developed by other relevant professional bodies. Examples of professional bodies that have developed codes of conduct or practice are listed on page 7
- **integrated by each college** into its institutional policies and quality systems, and supported by appropriate staff development
- **focused on professional standards of conduct** rather than competence in the responsibilities of a post. Standards of competence already exist in FE: for example, personnel standards (IPD); management standards (MCI); and teaching standards (FENTO).

The code also needs to be:

- **inclusive** – covering all who are engaged in FE regardless of context or role
- **positive and dynamic** – setting high standards while recognising the reality of FE
- **supportive and developmental**
- **concise** – balancing the need for brevity and accessibility with sufficient detail to be of real value
- **clear and constructive** – avoiding ambiguity
- **nationally recognised** – with an inbuilt understanding of institutional diversity.

4. Guidelines for using the code

There is little value in a code of practice unless it becomes embedded in routine activity throughout the sector. It cannot afford to be treated cynically or ignored, and it needs to be owned by all.

1. Staff will have faith in a code if it has a high profile. Strong commitment from the top is essential, and collective responsibility for creating and supporting the FE learning environment must be recognised. Ideally, the code will be endorsed and validated:
   - nationally, by all key national partners (including DfEE, FEFC, HEFCE, AoC, staff and student unions, teacher education, awarding bodies)
   - locally by principals, corporations, the staff of all colleges and key local partners.
2. Ownership of the code needs to be encouraged at all levels. Individual institutions need the opportunity, through dialogue, to expand the base set of given values, by developing their own examples to supplement those provided.
3. The strategy for the launch and introduction of the code in a college needs to be carefully planned as an integral and supportive part of the college's development. Therefore:
   - roles and responsibilities need to be clearly identified in good time
   - managers and unions need to be key partners in the introduction and implementation of the code
   - the code needs to be regularly affirmed.
4. The code needs to be explicitly integrated with existing policies and procedures at all levels, to avoid confusion and duplication:
   - links with HR management functions need to be clarified and communicated; e.g. contracts, training, appraisal, industrial relations, discipline.

   How does the current framework support the code? What training and reference materials need to be developed and provided?

   The code must complement existing quality-assurance systems, focusing on the relationship between values and action. It also needs to be supported and monitored as part of those systems:
   - nationally via FEFC self-assessment and college accreditation
   - in colleges.

   Evaluation of the code is most effective when it is an integral part of a structured review process. Staff are keen to see a consistent approach to monitoring the code, especially as it might be open to partial interpretation or abuse.
5. Decisions are needed as to how the code might be monitored.
   - What evidence (routines, rituals, styles) would constitute good or poor practice?
   - Does the code make a difference to the public's view of the sector/college?
   - What are the implications of a breach of the code for employers and staff?
   - What sanctions should/can be applied to the code?
   - The code will need to be widely accessible if it is to be monitored. How might it best be circulated?

A contribution to the debate

This code is offered as a contribution to the debate about how the FE sector defines and affirms its professionalism. Contributions to the debate are welcomed. Anyone wishing to participate should contact FEDA (Tel: 0207 840 5400).

Possible uses of the code

- teacher education
- staff recruitment and selection
- student induction
- student questionnaires
- staff induction
- mentoring
- equal opportunities training
- staff appraisal
- self assessment
- quality management
- governor training
- management training
- learning manager/ tutor training.

5. Applications of the code in the learning environment

This code has been produced and piloted by FEDA and staff, managers, unions, governors and students in FE colleges and FE teacher education providers. It aims to clarify the obligations of all who work in the sector, thus enhancing the sector's reputation, status and effectiveness. The code would form the basis of all thinking, planning and activity at work, underpinning all policies and procedures.

1. Recognise that learners and learning are our core responsibilities, and act appropriately

- Work to ensure that learners achieve their goals.
- Be aware of learners' concerns, identifying their individual needs and drawing on their experience.
- Promote each learner's personal, social and professional development as a whole person.
- Place a high value on the learning process.
- Encourage learners and colleagues, as individuals and as groups, to become active partners in the ongoing planning, delivery and evaluation of learning.
- Make learning challenging, creative and enjoyable.
- Understand how learners can best be supported.

2. Recognise and respect the uniqueness of each individual

- Have positive expectations of colleagues and learners, raising standards of motivation, behaviour and achievement.
- Foster a welcoming learning environment.
- Deal sensitively with people with full regard for their needs, problems and the pressures under which they work and, where necessary, resolve conflicts.
- Foster initiative, and help learners take responsibility for, and organise, their own learning environment.
- Challenge discriminatory and offensive remarks, behaviour and practices.

3. Be honest, clear and open in all communications, acting with integrity and fairness, and challenging discrimination

- Provide accurate and unbiased information and guidance in a way that can be readily understood, ensuring learners have every opportunity to make well-informed decisions about their futures.
- Recommend a programme that is in the learner's best interests, and ensure that it appropriately meets the learner's abilities and aspirations.
- Develop mutual trust, and work in a direct, open, approachable and cooperative partnership with learners and colleagues.
- Refrain from criticising others in the hearing of those who are not directly involved.
- Challenge discriminatory and offensive remarks, behaviour and practices.

4. Contribute to the success of the college by actively seeking to develop innovative, effective and efficient ways of achieving the college's goals

- Deliver a flexible programme, planned in cooperation with colleagues, capable of adaptation in the light of circumstances.
- Work with learners and colleagues to develop a thoughtful and evaluative approach to performance, offering feedback.

5. Be informed about, understand and fulfil our legal responsibilities

- Ensure a well-prepared, safe and welcoming learning environment.
- Challenge discriminatory and offensive remarks, behaviour and practices.
- Be familiar with the student charter and help to make it work.

6. Challenge any abuse of privileged relationships, respecting and protecting confidentiality

- Never allow situations to develop where a special relationship with a learner or a colleague may influence professional judgement.
- Never use any position we have to bring undue pressure on a learner or colleague by, for instance, bullying or harassment.
- Develop mutual trust and work in a direct, open, approachable and cooperative partnership with learners and colleagues.
- Be aware of assessment and examination sensitivities and pressures.

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7. Ensure that our work conforms to external and internal quality standards

- Participate in team assessment activities to ensure appropriate, fair and consistent standards and act upon the outcomes of internal and external verification.
- For those with responsibility for assessment, be familiar with assessment/examinations procedures and ensure well-prepared, organised and sensitively invigilated examinations and tests, meeting the specific requirements of awarding bodies.
- Respond to criticisms and complaints promptly, constructively and in accordance with college procedures.
- Seek opportunities to develop a self-critical, analytical and reflective culture.
- Take a positive approach to our own professional development, developing our knowledge, skills and practice to meet the needs of all.

8. Request and use resources responsibly, efficiently and effectively

- Deliver a flexible programme, planned in cooperation with colleagues, capable of adaptation in the light of circumstances.
- Take a positive approach to environmental responsibilities.
- Take a positive approach to our own health and well-being.

6. Feedback from pilot colleges

Greenwich University

Greenwich University Post-Compulsory Education and Training department undertook two exercises. In the first, it mapped the pilot codes against six proposed core units for a joint PGCE/Cert.Ed. programme for pre-service and in-service FE teachers and trainers. Key findings were that the code placed greater emphasis on:

- values and attitudes compared with the PGCE units' emphasis on underpinning knowledge
- the teacher's behaviour as an employee at a specific institution
- the FE learner rather than the FE teacher.

The pilot study also explored more effective ways of matching the needs of colleges and teacher educationalists. Colleges need staff to have a corporate focus and work toward maintaining the college's position in a competitive environment but university training programmes need to meet the assessment requirements of an academic framework.
Questions raised in the pilot included:

- How might attitudes and values be assessed?
- Where does the training provider's responsibility end and the employer's responsibility begin?

In the second exercise, a PGCE tutorial reviewed the codes in response to structured questions. There was some surprise that no code yet existed, and most felt one was needed. Participants wanted support in meeting what seemed daunting requirements and questioned whether FE students had to make similar commitments. They felt there was little value in a voluntary code, but queried whether there would be a safety net for tutors, in the event of 'a student simply turning against you'.

Handsworth College

Handsworth College piloted the code in teacher education and staff induction in the context of its quality standards for teaching and learning. Participants in the pilot study wanted more example materials and the continued active involvement of recognised trade unions and professional associations. They perceived a danger that the code might raise impossible expectations in a diverse and unevenly resourced sector, with consequent monitoring implications. They asked:

- How applicable is the code to such diverse institutions as FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and private training providers?
- What opportunities exist to link the development of the code with other wider initiatives, such as the shift to regionalisation, and the Cadbury committee's findings?

Loughborough College

Loughborough College piloted the code in staff induction to great support from both new and existing staff, who welcomed the attempt to clarify and articulate shared principles. Agreed plans for the code's introduction to new faculty staff were only partially successful, because they coincided with management changes and a review of college systems. Where staff had the opportunity to talk through the code's purpose at induction, however, it worked well and the half-term review session chaired by the principal as part of his induction was effective, demonstrating the clear commitment of the executive, governors and academic board. Effective use of the code depends on all staff knowing its terms, and mentors looked for briefing and training. Delays in identifying mentors made this difficult.

There was a strong desire across the college to integrate the code with college and faculty policies, and it was included in the quality manual and course log. Selective focus on specific bullet points as an agenda item in meetings proved particularly useful, whether in programme leaders' curriculum review, mentor/new staff sessions, or course team meetings. Staff expected the code to be monitored but wanted to know how. Both managers and staff found the supplementary guidelines in the original code valuable.

Middlesbrough College

Middlesbrough College piloted the code in student induction, course review and teacher education. A cross-college team, representing management, full-time and part-time staff, planned its introduction. There was no feedback from its circulation through the staff bulletin but smaller forums provided useful responses.

The most successful approach was through three 7306/Cert.Ed. tutorials, where discussion provided a valuable focus at the beginning of the programme. Trainee teachers saw the code as an ideal in an imperfect world. They welcomed its clarity and looked for commitment from college managers providing professional development and fostering a climate of open discussion. It was felt to counterbalance possible tunnel vision in sections of the college.

Trainee teachers asked for clarification as to responsibilities and methods of monitoring the code, to prevent mere lip service to it. Extracts were used as the basis of a student questionnaire (e.g. 'So far, the tutors have made my learning challenging, creative and enjoyable.') Some staff found this provided useful feedback, but others saw it as too tutor-focused or felt the language was confusing to students. The college continues to use some of the questions.

The code was also introduced at the joint consultation and negotiation committee, and service heads' resources and planning committee, where it was welcomed as providing a professional framework, and integrating with work currently in hand.

There was a question raised about whether the code's demands are potentially unrealistic, given increasingly scarce resources and the structural problems in FE.

Norfolk College

Norfolk College tested the code through staff induction, an Investors in People working party, the INSET committee, the academic board and the quality training unit. All welcomed the code as a means of heightening FE professionalism, but urged that it be expressed in concise, readily portable format, thus significantly influencing the final code included in this bulletin. The code proved particularly helpful during staff induction, linked to discussion of the college's values, and customer care.

RNIB Vocational College

The RNIB Vocational College in Loughborough found the code valuable in new staff induction. Unfortunately, the project was put on the back burner during a college restructuring. It is worth noting that another college that had been very keen to be involved in the project decided to withdraw when a major restructuring became necessary, feeling it to be insensitive to be working on the code at the same time.

Sheffield College

Sheffield College tested the code in staff induction, where it proved supportive and helpful. It was also particularly valuable when working with trade unions and governors. The code integrated well with the human resources values statement in the college strategic plan.

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7. Possible sources of information and other codes

Association of Colleges
Fifth floor, Centre Point, 103 New Oxford Street,
London WC1A 1DU
Tel: 0207 827 4600

Association for College Management
130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG
Tel: 0116 275 5076

Association of Educational Psychologists
c/o 26 The Avenue, Durham DH1 4ED
Tel: 0191 384 9512

Association of Teachers and Lecturers
7 Northumberland Street, London WC2N 5DA
Tel: 0207 930 6441

British Association for Counselling
1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2PJ
Tel: 01788 578328

British Association of Social Workers
16 Kent Street, Birmingham B5 6RD
Tel: 0121 622 3911

Committee on Standards in Public Life
Horse Guards Road, London SW1A 3AL
Tel: 0207 270 6345

Derbyshire Constabulary
Butterley Hall, Ripley, Derbyshire DE5 3RS
Tel: 01773 570100

Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO)
Fifth Floor, Centre Point, 103 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1DU
Tel: 0207 827 4600

Institute of Careers Guidance
27a Lower High Street, Stourbridge DY8 1TA
Tel: 01384 376464

Institute of Personnel and Development
IPD House, Camp Road, London SW19 4UX
Tel: 0208 971 9000

Leicestershire Adult Guidance Network
Career Points, 1 Pocklington Walk
Leicester LE1 6BT
Tel: 0116 262 7284

Leicestershire County Council
County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8RF
Tel: 0116 265 6300

Management Charter Initiative
Russell Square House, 10–12 Russell Square
London WC1B 5BZ
Tel: 0207 872 9000

National Association of Managers of Student Services
c/o 9 Ashleigh Road, Weston super Mare BS23 2XG

National Association of Teachers
in Further and Higher Education
27 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JP
Tel: 0207 387 3636

National Union of Teachers
Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD
Tel: 0207 388 6191

Teacher Training Agency
PO Box 3210, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 3WA
Tel: 01245 454454

UK Central Council for Nursing Midwifery
and Health Visiting
23 Portland Place, London W1N 4JT
Tel: 0207 637 7181

UNISON
1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ
Tel: 0207 388 2366

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Acknowledgements

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The revised code was piloted by these colleges and the results were analysed at a further seminar, prompting additional amendments. The draft code in this bulletin is the outcome of the project and is now offered to the sector at large.

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